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‘Ay, ay, divil, all’s raight! We’ve smashed ’em!’: Translating Violence and ‘Yorkshire Roughness’ in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*

SOPHIE FRANKLIN

By taking Yorkshire Luddism as *Shirley*’s (1849) framework, Charlotte Brontë places political violence at the centre of its narrative. Despite this, much of the novel’s inclusions of violence are largely undescribed and even unwitnessed, often displaced to another site, such as a letter or nameless voice. When politically motivated attacks committed by working-class characters are represented, these moments are mediated by an upper-middle-class spectator or translator. This paper seeks to identify and explore the presence and significance of politically motivated violence in the novel, emphasizing its centrality within the text and highlighting its connection with nineteenth-century attitudes to issues of regional dialect, the legitimacy of force and ‘Yorkshire roughness’.

KEYWORDS dialect, Luddism, *Shirley*, translation, violence, Yorkshire

In January 1850, the *Edinburgh Review* published an unsigned review of Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1849), declaring it ‘even coarser in texture [than *Jane Eyre*]’.¹ The piece caused Brontë especial dismay, as it listed the apparent flaws of the novel and, more perniciously, repeatedly blamed these supposed weaknesses on the fact that Currer Bell was a woman. The reviewer’s gender-based comments included a swipe at Brontë’s regional identity as an author, advising her ‘to sacrifice a little of her Yorkshire roughness to the demands of good taste: neither saturating her writings with such rudeness and offensive harshness, nor suffering her style to wander into such vulgarities as would be inexcusable — even in a man’.² The harsh criticism levelled against *Shirley* prompted Brontë to declare the review ‘very brutal and savage’ and that it made her feel ‘cold and sick’.³ These feelings were exacerbated by the knowledge that the review had been written by George Henry Lewes, someone Brontë considered a supporter and to whom she wrote after reading the review: ‘I can be on guard against my enemies, but God deliver me from my friends’.⁴

This notion of ‘Yorkshire roughness’, to which Lewes and other contemporary critics made repeated reference in relation to *Shirley*, corresponds to Brontë’s representations of political violence in the novel. Set between 1811 and 1812, the novel takes Yorkshire Luddism as its backdrop, at a time when new industrial technological advancements were being introduced into factories across the UK. These machines, as the narrator of *Shirley* explains, ‘threw thousands out of work, and left them without legitimate means of sustaining life’.⁵ A pocket of these disenfranchised workers sought retaliation by destroying the technology that had replaced them and by disseminating their political message to a wider audience through poetry and other literary forms. The Luddites were also associated with more serious crimes, particularly the assassination of William Horsfall, the owner of a large woollen mill near Huddersfield. This real-life murder inspired Brontë when dramatizing the attempted assassination of her novel’s ‘hero’ Robert Moore, the Anglo-Belgian mill-owner. Moreover, this was a period of widespread disorder beyond national borders, as the Napoleonic Wars were ongoing from 1803 to 1815 and had a direct impact on the textile industry in the North of England. The narrator of *Shirley* remarks that, during this period, the ‘throes of a sort of moral earthquake were felt heaving under the hills of the northern counties. But, as is usual in such cases, nobody took much notice’ (S, p. 37).

By taking Yorkshire Luddism as the framework of her novel, Brontë is placing political violence at the heart of her narrative. Despite this, much of the novel’s political violence goes largely unseen; and, when the politically motivated attacks carried out by working-class characters are described, these moments are displaced onto another medium or mediated by a more ‘refined’ middle-/upper-class spectator or translator. By analysing the mediation and translation of ‘coarse’ language and voices in *Shirley*, this article asks: what implications does such mediation have on the political violence represented throughout the novel? And, if representations of political violence are obscured and even left undescribed, then where does the violence reside in the text? Through an exploration of these questions, this paper seeks to pinpoint and decipher the presence of politically motivated violence in the novel, thereby emphasizing its centrality within the narrative and highlighting the connection between accusations of ‘Yorkshire roughness’ and depictions of political violence in the text.

Much has been written on the violent political episodes in *Shirley*, particularly the climactic mill attack which will be addressed later in this article. Critics such as Terry Eagleton, Patricia Ingham and Sally Shuttleworth have contributed immeasurably to a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the interactions between politics, class and violence in *Shirley*.⁶ This is by no means an exhaustive list, as the presence of Luddism in the novel has a certain critical currency.⁷ Although many of these critics mention or elaborate on violence of a political nature in Charlotte Brontë’s writing, the violence in and of itself — as a mediated, often unseen presence in the novel — remains a largely un-broached topic. Even nineteenth-century reviewers, as Ingham notes, ‘often ignored’ the attack

on Moore and his mill in their critical appraisals, with Lewes's evaluation as an example.⁸ This article seeks to rectify partially this gap by focusing specifically on scenes of political violence in *Shirley* and their connection with attitudes to coarseness and language in the early to mid-nineteenth century. While there are several instances of violence within the novel, such as the dog bite Shirley Keeldar receives and then cauterizes herself, as well as the societal suppression of women with which Caroline Helstone mentally and physically grapples, politically inflected violent incidents are the focus here. This article considers political violence to be embodied by physical or linguistic force committed against a person or property; and as something that emerges, as Ekkart Zimmerman writes, out of a 'process that takes place between various groups or categories of actors within a political system'.⁹ Crucially for the following discussion of *Shirley*, politicized acts of violence are not 'limited to acts performed by rebels against the state, but should also apply to violent activities carried out by agents against its citizens'.¹⁰

Sarah Cole notes that, since 'at least the nineteenth century, violence has been understood and registered as an ineluctable aspect of industrial modernity'.¹¹ During the period in which the Brontës published their novels, violence was typically deemed to reside almost exclusively in the working class. Anna Clark writes that, during the nineteenth century, violence 'acquired a symbolic currency in political discourse, for middle-class men pointed to their own self-control as a justification for their claims to political power while at the same time attacking the working class as too violent to deserve the vote'.¹² In 1838, Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School and father of poet Matthew Arnold, articulated this view in a letter to the *Hertford Reformer*, in response to the first rumblings of Chartism: 'Has the world ever yet seen a population so dangerous in every respect to the society in which it existed as the manufacturing population of Great Britain?'¹³ Arnold's hyperbolic description of the manufacturing 'masses' as the most dangerous portion of any society in the world underlines the fears surrounding the threat of working-class revolutionary violence during this period. His letter also crystallizes some of the catalysts of such fears, particularly the perception of industrial workers as somewhere between 'slaves' and 'what citizens ought to be'.¹⁴ This nineteenth-century articulation of political violence and its association with the working class are pertinent to Brontë's *Shirley*, as the novel's representations of violence hinge on nineteenth-century questions of legitimacy and reasonableness.

In *Shirley*, the reader is introduced to the violence of the Luddites via a voice and a letter. As Moore waits for the safe delivery of his new machinery, the 'still, dark, and stagnant' night is disturbed by the sound of 'heavy wheels crunching a stony road' (*S*, p. 38). The noise anticipates the arrival of the frames, which Moore 'love[s]' and on which he 'had risked the last of his capital' (*S*, p. 39). The darkness prevents Moore from seeing who drives the waggons: whether it is Joe Scott, his 'over-looker'; or his 'well-wishers', ex-workers who are reportedly planning to smash his equipment in revenge for their being replaced by

technology (S, pp. 18–19). The fact that the waggons are empty does not become apparent to Moore until an unidentifiable figure appears from one of the carts and responds to the mill-owner's query as to whether "all [is] right": "Ay, ay, divil, all's raight! We've smashed 'em!" (S, p. 39). The words render Moore 'silent, and even motionless', until a horse appears with a letter attached to its harness (S, p. 39). It is addressed to "the Divil of Hollow's-miln" and written in a 'peculiar' orthography, which the narrator chooses to 'translate [...] into legible English':

"Your hellish machinery is shivered to smash on Stilbro' Moor, and your men are lying bound hand and foot in a ditch by the roadside. Take this as a warning from men that are starving, and have starving wives and children to go home to when they have done this deed. If you get new machines, or if you otherwise go on as you have done, you shall hear from us again. Beware!" (S, p. 40)

The practice of changing and explaining coarser, less 'genteel' language is echoed in Charlotte Brontë's 1850 'Preface' to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, in which she addresses a 'large class of readers' unaccustomed to 'the rough, strong utterance, the harshly manifested passions, the unbridled aversions, and headlong partialities of unlettered moorland hinds and rugged moorland squires, who have grown up untaught and unchecked'.¹⁵ Her tone here is (arguably) ironic; she subtly disparages those 'with feelings moderate in degree, and little marked in kind' to whom the language of the 'wild moors of the north of England' is 'unintelligible, and — where intelligible — repulsive'.¹⁶ Brontë remains typically ambivalent on the issue, though she acknowledges the North/South divide in terms of vernacular and outlook. In an 1848 letter to her publisher's reader and confidant, William Smith Williams, she addresses the matter of Yorkshire dialect while editing *Wuthering Heights* for its reissue, writing that she may 'modify the orthography of the old servant Joseph's speech' as she is 'sure Southerners must find it unintelligible — and thus one of the most graphic characters in the book is lost on them'.¹⁷

Brontë's wariness regarding the inclusion of Yorkshire dialect and manners in her sister's novel, as well as her own, was not unfounded. Several critics, including Lewes, noted *Shirley*'s regional specificity, with one writing in *Atlas Magazine*: "Remote from towns", the people run a rather godless and very uncivilised race; and, to our southern visions, the entire environments of the piece seem somewhat strange and uncouth'.¹⁸ Another critic spoke directly of the novel's 'coarseness': 'the generality of the characters have so strong a dash of the repelling, as well as of a literal provincial coarseness, that the attractive effect is partly marred by the ill-conditioned nature of the persons, whether it be the author's fault or Yorkshire's'.¹⁹ Katie Wales notes that 'to sensitive Victorians the ugliness of the industrial North was mirrored in the uncouthness of the language'.²⁰ A link between political violence and dialect emerges here, as Wales writes that 'historically' dialects from Northern England were seen, like violence, 'as "sub-standard": socially stigmatized and culturally inferior, "provincial" and

(in particular) "working class" and "uncouth".²¹ Brontë was aware of these prejudices and anticipated such critical responses, perhaps exacerbated by the accusations of coarseness levelled at *Jane Eyre* by the likes of Elizabeth Rigby in the *Quarterly Review*.²² Her narrator in *Shirley* warns readers: 'Now, let me hear the most refined of Cockneys presume to find fault with Yorkshire manners! Taken as they ought to be, the majority of the lads and lasses of the West-Riding are gentlemen and ladies, every inch of them' (S, p. 400). Notably, and perhaps deliberately, the decoding of the letter in *Shirley* from a 'peculiar orthography' to more standardized language obscures the link between dialect and violence, as the 'Yorkshire roughness' of the note is no longer visible.

Brontë's use of the letter to signal violence is in keeping with historical accounts of Luddism, in which, as Heather Miner notes, 'letters, poems, and hymns' played a vital role in publicly expressing the demands of the movement.²³ Literary form was central to the development and dissemination of regional Luddite identity; as Adrian Randall notes, the 'hallmark of Luddism [...] was the threatening letter'.²⁴ In enabling the letter to be read by all, including 'Southerns', Brontë propagates the message across class and country, while also providing an authentic — in terms of medium — insight into the non-physical, but not necessarily non-violent, methods adopted by the Luddites to further their cause. The translation seems to open up the content of the letter to a wider audience, ensuring that the conflict is not 'lost on' anyone.

The decision to alter the dialect of the machine-breakers does, however, indicate a linguistic gulf between them and the readers, highlighting the difference between the few working-class voices in the novel and the predominantly middle-class readership. Susan Belasco Smith extends this point, writing that dialect is used by Brontë to 'call attention to the barriers established by a society that discriminates against its less powerful members'.²⁵ On one level, Brontë may be attempting to dismantle these barriers through translation. Yet translating the note ultimately erases the vernacular of one class while elevating another. For Albert D. Pionke, the 'self-conscious task of translation effectively distances reasonable readers from the content as well as the form of the Luddite's message'.²⁶ The narrator's decision to decode the note places him on the side of so-called 'reasonable' readers who speak 'legible English'. This possible preference is highlighted later in the novel when one of the supposed ringleaders of the frame-breakers, Noah o' Tim's, demands Moore to "hear reason, and should you refuse, it is my duty to warn you [...] that measures will be had resort to (he meant recourse)" (S, p. 150). The narrator's interjection deflates the forcefulness of Noah's speech, reminding the reader that, though he calls for reason from Moore, he does not understand his own language and therefore cannot fully express his meaning. Once again, the connection between dialect and violence becomes apparent, as Noah's warning is bound up with his imprecise word choice.

As Miner points out, the 'correction' of Yorkshire language anticipates the 'translation of French into English throughout the book', linking the 'alien'

Moore family of Belgian descent with the disenfranchised and desperate Luddites (*S*, pp. 45, 52, 60).²⁷ Considering the instability of the 1810s, partly caused by the tumultuous political situation in France, there was a general suspicion of all things French at this time, which accounts for the Moore family's designation as "perfect outcast[s] on these shores" (*S*, p. 150). Similarly, the Luddites were and, according to E. P. Thompson, continue to be seen as 'an uncouth, spontaneous affair of illiterate handworkers, blindly resisting machinery'.²⁸ This implicit alignment of the different languages of the workers and masters destabilizes the neat division between disenfranchised labourers and powerful manufacturers, preventing any seamless interpretation of the class warfare depicted in *Shirley* and highlighting the ambivalence of Brontë's view. While some French is translated, there are still substantial scenes in which it remains intact, particularly during conversations between Moore and Hiram Yorke, 'a French-speaking Yorkshire gentleman' and fellow mill-owner (*S*, p. 53). Yorke slips between 'broad Yorkshire' and 'pure English', which makes his 'station' difficult to determine (*S*, p. 50). Yet, although Moore, Yorke and their workers are all varyingly alienated by their dialects, the foreignness of the former is advantaged over that of the latter due to their roles as middle-class businessmen.

What are the implications of the translated note on the violence that precedes and follows its delivery? As the actual violent event is left largely undescribed and unseen, the violence of the scene resides in the letter. Randall writes that '[t]hreatening letters [...] were in themselves a significant weapon' wielded by the Luddites.²⁹ By figuring the billet as something with which to commit violence, the harm caused by the frame-breaking is extended by the letter's delivery. It stands in for the violent event in the novel, while also embodying a form of violence itself. The note comes after the deliberate damaging of property, as well as the forceful binding of men on the moor. In distancing readers from the machine-breakers' regionality and, perhaps by extension, their ideology through the translation of the letter, Brontë also detaches readers from the violence and from the potential justification of — or indeed the empathetic reaction to — such destructive action. Any attempt to comprehend the reasons behind the Luddites' violence is therefore always mediated, whether by the letter or by its translation.

The warning that Moore "shall hear from [them]" and that he should "[b]eware" also reminds the reader of the 'fate' of fellow mill-owners, Pearson and Armitage — both "shot, one in his own house and the other on the moor" (*S*, p. 19). The note refers back to the recent attack on Moore's machinery and to the previous instances of violence, while also signalling forward to the eventual attempted assassination of Moore himself. The letter is, then, surrounded by and embedded in violence, positioning it at the centre of the conflict. It is a tangible attempt to legitimize the frame smashing *and* a material warning to Moore to roll back the introduction of technology into his mill.

The legitimization of the violence that the letter represents is suggested through the double decoding of the note. This involves, firstly, the articulation of the violence within the letter form, which transforms a physical act into a textual

expression; then, secondly, the translation of the note itself from the Yorkshire dialect into a more 'neutral' one. By writing down their actions in the form of a letter, the frame-breakers are offering their opponents a means of interpretation. This, alongside the narrator's translation of the letter, suggests that the violence embodied by and in the note can be transformed into something justifiable. If something can be made 'legible', and therefore understandable, the writing must contain a message that itself can be understood and even acknowledged as reasonable. By expressing the violent actions through language, the frame-breakers are attempting to explain and therefore justify their position; and, by then ensuring this position could be read and comprehended by 'Southerns', the narrator is emphasizing their right to be heard and recognized, thereby validating their message. In *Shirley*, by trying to render their violence legitimate through language, the Luddites are attempting to shift the perception of their violent actions away from the unlawful towards something more legitimate. It is the translation of their note that dilutes the Luddites' message and undercuts their claim to the legitimacy of violence.

Through speech, and often in Yorkshire dialect, William Farren attempts to explain the workers' position to Moore, focusing, like the Luddite letter, on the intense hunger of the men's families and on the fact that they "can get nought to do [... and] can earn nought" (*S*, p. 153). For Farren, who does not align himself with Luddism, talking is the most powerful weapon to wield in the face of injustice: "I'm not for shedding blood: I'd neither kill a man nor hurt a man; and I'm not for pulling down mills and breaking machines: for, as ye say, that way o' going on 'll niver stop invention; but I'll talk,—I'll mak' as big a din as ever I can" (*S*, p. 154). Words are his defence and his appeal to 'reasonableness' is noted by Moore: later in the novel, we learn that Moore has secured Farren a job as a gardener for Shirley Keeldar (*S*, p. 182). Unlike the other men who visit Moore, "William did not threaten" (*S*, p. 180). This distinction between reason and threat opens a gulf between the more 'rational' working-class characters within the novel and the figures who use terror as their primary weapon. This raises the question: is there a difference between the verbal weapons wielded by the likes of Farren and the (often linguistic) political violence committed by the Luddites in *Shirley*?

Noting Farren's movement between Yorkshire and non-Yorkshire vernacular, Pionke considers Brontë's 'abandonment of dialect at key moments' to be a deliberate means of emphasizing 'Farren's reasonableness, which is reinforced by his eschewal of violence'.³⁰ By switching between 'legible' English and Yorkshire dialect, Brontë 'allows non-Yorkshire readers to feel that [Farren] is speaking their language as well'.³¹ As with the letter, Farren's words are modified for the reader. Yet, unlike the note, Farren's message is one of peace; he is denouncing violence and advocating for a more diplomatic, but not necessarily less forceful, approach. By allowing him to move between the two vernaculars, Brontë is showing that Yorkshire people are not uncouth and that a Yorkshire accent does not preclude reasonableness. Through Farren, however, Brontë is also — consciously or

otherwise — undermining the Luddites, by proving that violence is not essential or inevitable. By speaking the readers' language, Farren is suggesting the unnecessary nature of political violence and painting the Luddites as backward, brutal and irrational in the process.

During the clash between Moore's men and the Luddites, political violence is again displaced from the physical to the linguistic. As Eagleton points out, the event is 'curiously empty' of working-class protagonists, who are 'distinguished primarily by [their] absence'.³² This is also true of the violence, which remains indistinct and largely unseen, as the reader sees through the eyes of Shirley and Caroline who observe the action from afar.³³ The most descriptive aspect of the scene comes in the form of a 'rioters' yell', which stands in for more explicit descriptions of the violent clash:

[A] rioters' yell—a North-of-England—a Yorkshire—a West-Riding—a West-Riding clothing-district-of-Yorkshire rioters' yell. You never heard that sound before, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears [...] since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself, or to the men or principles you approve, the interests to which you wish well, Wrath wakens to the cry of Hate: the Lion shakes his mane, and rises to the howl of the Hyena: Caste stands up, ireful, against Caste; and the indignant, wronged spirit of the Middle Rank bears down in zeal and scorn on the famished and furious mass of the Operative Class. (*S*, p. 386)

This precise definition of the rioters' cry recalls the translation of the Luddites' note in the novel's opening. Like the note, the yell must be explained and decoded for the reader, whom the narrator assumes would 'never [have] heard' such a sound before. While this regional specificity is perhaps an attempt to pinpoint and therefore elucidate the noise and its meaning, Brontë's exactness also alienates those unfamiliar with the sound. As Kathleen Tillotson notes, the novel is 'defiantly regional' and 'there is a Carlylean challenge in the steadily narrowing definition of locality' in the yell.³⁴ Unless the reader has lived in a clothing district of the West Riding, the yell is placed pointedly beyond the realms of their experience and imagination. Brontë reminds us, once again, of the gap between those uninitiated with the ways and people of Yorkshire, and those of whom she writes. Through the exact description of the shout, the reader, like Shirley and Caroline, is positioned outside the attack, both physically and culturally.

The cry also sets the two sides of the conflict even further apart, as the narrator makes it clear that the clash is 'Caste' versus 'Caste', with Moore's side positioned as superior. Moore, and the 'Middle Rank' he represents, is imagined as a 'Lion' shaking its 'mane' in response to the 'howl of the Hyena', the 'Operative Class'. This dehumanizing metaphor both emphasizes the notion that violence reduces men to animals, and underlines the supremacy of Moore and his men. As the 'Lion' of the battle, Moore embodies the military prowess, courage and strength enshrined in the British character by the legend of King Richard I, *Cœur de Lion*. The fact that Moore is positioned as a protector of England is perhaps another of Brontë's ironies. The patriotic image is, however, in direct contrast to

that of the scavenging joker of the animal kingdom, the 'Hyena'. Nineteenth-century characterizations of hyenas propagated the perception of the animal as 'rank and coarse', and the media at that time regularly portrayed them as 'dangerous (though cowardly) beasts prone to [...] bite the hands that fed them'.³⁵ Though no longer fed by their work at the mill, the frame-breakers are violently demonstrating against those who hold the power and the purse-strings. While Brontë does not explicitly align her narrator with a side, her representation of Moore as a lion and the frame-breakers as hyenas reveals an inherent bias, one perhaps enabled by the attack's mediation through the upper-middle-class female characters whose immediate and personal sympathies lie with the former.

While the cry both involves the reader in and distances them from the conflict, the yell also echoes through historical accounts of working-class unrest. The cry becomes a recognizable symbol of political conflict, one that seems to transcend dialect. In 1880, the West Riding journalist, Frank Peel, drew on oral tradition to relate the Luddite uprisings across Yorkshire, giving an account of the attack on Cartwright's mill in 1812, which influenced Brontë's own depiction of Luddism. Peel's recounting of the Rawfolds attack opens with an epigraph taken from Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion*, published in 1808: 'And such a yell was there / Of sudden and portentous birth, / As if men fought upon the earth / And fiends in upper air'.³⁶ The centrality of such a 'portentous' shout within Peel's account of the mill attack suggests the resonance of the sound within representations of Northern political violence. Considering Brontë's devotion to Scott, it is likely she was familiar with *Marmion*'s 'yell'. In May 1848, when preparing *Shirley*, Brontë wrote to Williams of the need for the 'better ordering of the Social System', concluding: 'when Patience has done its utmost and Industry its best, whether in the case of Women or Operates, and when both are baffled and Pain and Want [...] triumphant — the Sufferer is free — is entitled — at last to send up to Heaven any piercing cry for relief'.³⁷ In this light, the yell in *Shirley* is a cry of suffering and pain that resonated across England in the 1840s as it did in the earlier decades of the century.³⁸

The yell in *Shirley* is not that of an individual; it is part of a collective. In this, it resembles the letter, which is written from a nameless 'us'. In the description of the yell, the fact that the rioter is pluralized hints at the presence of a crowd, an image that haunted the early to mid-nineteenth-century imagination as a reminder of the French Revolution. Francesco Marroni contends that, in presenting the reader with the rioters' cry, Brontë is concerned with 'depicting an anonymous entity that, on a dark summer night, loses any physiognomic trait of humanity to become the very embodiment of evil'.³⁹ For Marroni, the lack of an individual voice heightens the non-human uncanniness of the cry and of Brontë's depiction of the Luddites. As Ingham sums up: 'Invisibility is menace'.⁴⁰ This feeds into the fear of 'the crowd', which, for Marroni, 'unites and concentrates thousands of individuals and transforms them into a savage and uncontrollable force that has neither a single given behaviour nor a dominant voice'.⁴¹ Brontë's description of the source of the cry — 'the famished and furious *mass* of the Operative Class'

— underlines this homogenization of the working class. Later, the Luddites are again described as a ‘mass of rioters’ (S, p. 387, emphasis mine); and it is only when the battle is over that individual men other than Moore are noticed, though never identified or named: ‘a human body lay quiet on its face near the gates; and five or six wounded men writhed and moaned in the bloody dust’ (S, p. 389). Upon seeing the dead and injured men, humanized by their suffering, Shirley’s ‘countenance changed’, as she encounters the ‘aftertaste of the battle’ (S, p. 389).

While the shout does provoke terror, not least through its unfamiliarity to the reader, the specificity of the yell does not only invite animalistic comparisons. Though indeed anonymous, in that there is no individualized source, the sound is unmistakably human. It is unique to that region within the county, but it is also the ‘cry of Hate’, blasted by the ‘famished and furious mass of the Operative Class’, like the ‘cry for relief’ described by Brontë in her letter to Williams. Contrary to Marroni’s view, the yell has a single source; it may not stem from an individual, but it does issue from a collective with a distinct and recognizable identity.

The lack of individuation in the mill attack is remedied by the shooting of Moore, committed by the anti-establishment ‘Antinomian weaver’, Mike Hartley (S, p. 19). Instead of a rioter’s yell, Moore’s shooting is preceded by a speech that seeks to justify Hartley’s subsequent actions. Notably, the source of the words is not identified until after the event, so the voice is given the dehumanizing pronoun ‘it’: “When the wicked perisheth, there is shouting,” it said; and added, “As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more (with a deeper growl) [...] He shall die without knowledge” (S, p. 617). The gunshot, like the rioters’ yell, pierces through the evening: ‘A fierce flash and sharp crack violated the calm of night’ (S, p. 617). The word ‘violated’ is a loaded one, signalling a violent break with nature and suggestive of the physical violation of Moore’s body by the bullet. This double violation — and the ‘crack’ that heralds it — is the only reference to violence in the scene. Once again, the moment of violence is hidden from the reader, as well as Yorke, who is accompanying Moore. It is described through sound alone.

This distance is reflected in newspaper reports of one attempted and one successful assassination by the Luddites in 1812, articles that Brontë read while researching back issues of the *Leeds Mercury* before writing *Shirley*. William Cartwright, whom the *Leeds Mercury* refers to as the ‘intrepid defender of Rawfolds Mill’, survived the shooting by assailants hidden ‘behind an hedge’.⁴² On 2 May 1812, it was reported that the four murderers of Horsfall, ‘a very extensive Woollen Manufacturer’, ‘placed the barrels of their pistols in apertures of the wall [*sic*]’.⁴³ The impulse to conceal remains in *Shirley*. Brontë chooses a more solid, less permeable blockade between the violence and the witness, however; Yorke, ‘no longer surrounded by heath’, sees ‘a hat rise’ and hears ‘a voice speak behind the wall’ before the gun is fired (S, p. 617). Through the impermeable wall, only the gunshot is heard by Yorke, alongside Hartley’s words. As with Shirley and Caroline observing the mill attack, very little is seen by Yorke.

Notably, in relation to Hartley's speech, Yorke considers the 'words [...] peculiar' (S, p. 617). Looking back to the Luddite note at the novel's opening, the word 'peculiar' is a familiar one: the narrator also deemed the orthography of the letter 'peculiar', suggesting a link between the representation of the note and Hartley's words, as well as the defiantly specific rioters' yell. The source of this commonality is, somewhat paradoxically, alienation: all three instances of speech and writing are difficult — if not impossible — to comprehend. There is a "foreignness" to these forms of communication and the violence which they stand in for. When reporting the attempted assassination of Cartwright, the *Leeds Mercury* deemed the act 'so foreign to the feelings of Englishmen, and so much at variance with the courage and humanity of our national character'.⁴⁴ The image of the lionhearted patriot who uses violence justly is conjured here, as in *Shirley*, in contrast to the 'foreign' radical as the wielder of fear-inducing and illegitimate violence.

Moore's own "foreignness" complicates this neat division, of course, as does the ending of *Shirley*, in which the Hollow, 'once green, and lone, and wild', is now marked by 'stone and brick and ashes' with a 'mighty mill [...] ambitious as the tower of Babel' (S, p. 739). The novel is characteristically ambivalent regarding any overarching 'moral' and resists outright partisanship until the end (S, p. 740). Yet it remains consistent in its representation of violence. Through displacement, translation and mediation, the reader is repeatedly detached from scenes of political violence and from the Luddites' dialect. This distancing reveals a paradoxical process of both obscuring and making more 'legible' the violence and 'Yorkshire roughness' of Luddism, one which establishes the scenes of political violence in *Shirley* as contested sites of (mis)understanding that merit further critical consideration.

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Notes

¹ G. H. Lewes, from an unsigned review, *Edinburgh Review*, January 1850, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Miriam Allott (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 160–70 (p. 165).

² Lewes, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, p. 165.

³ To W. S. Williams, 10 January 1850, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends: Volume: II*

- 1848–1851, ed. by Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 328–30 (p. 328).
- ⁴ To G. H. Lewes, [?] 10 January 1850, *Letters*, II, 330.
- ⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, ed. by Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 37. Hereafter *S*.
- ⁶ See Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Patricia Ingham, *The Language of Gender and Class: Transformations in the Victorian Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); and Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- ⁷ Critics who have written about Luddism and the mill attack in *Shirley*, but are not cited in this article, include Asa Briggs, 'Private and Social Themes in *Shirley*', *Brontë Society Transactions*, 13.3 (1958), 203–19; Patrick Collier, 'The Lawless by Force ... The Peaceable by Kindness': Strategies of Social Control in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and the *Leeds Mercury*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 32.4 (1999), 279–98; Ken Hiltner, 'Shirley and the Luddites', *Brontë Studies*, 33.2 (2008), 148–58; and Peter J. Capuano, 'Networked Manufacture in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Victorian Studies*, 55.2 (2013), 231–42.
- ⁸ Ingham, p. 32.
- ⁹ Ekkart Zimmerman, *Political Violence, Crises, and Revolutions: Theories and Research* (Oxford: Routledge, 1983), p. 9.
- ¹⁰ Zimmerman, p. 9.
- ¹¹ Sarah Cole, *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 20–21.
- ¹² Anna Clark, 'Humanity or Justice?: Wifebeating and the law in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', *Regulating Womanhood: Historical Essays on Marriage, Motherhood and Sexuality*, ed. by Carol Smart (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 187–206 (p. 197).
- ¹³ Thomas Arnold, 'The State of the Manufacturing Population', 1 December 1838, *Hertford Reformer*, quoted in *The Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold* (New York: D. Appleton & Co.; Philadelphia: G. S. Appleton, 1845), pp. 452–57 (p. 453).
- ¹⁴ Arnold, p. 453.
- ¹⁵ Charlotte Brontë, 'Editor's Preface to the New [1850] Edition of *Wuthering Heights*', in *Wuthering Heights*, ed. by Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin, 2003), I–liv, p. I.
- ¹⁶ Charlotte Brontë, 'Preface', p. I.
- ¹⁷ To W. S. Williams, 27 September 1850, in *Letters*, II, 479–80 (p. 479).
- ¹⁸ Unsigned review, *Atlas*, 3 November 1849, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 119–21 (p. 120).
- ¹⁹ Unsigned review, *The Spectator*, 3 November 1849, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 130–32 (p. 131).
- ²⁰ Katie Wales, *Northern English: A Cultural and Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 115.
- ²¹ Wales, p. 4.
- ²² Elizabeth Rigby contended that, in *Jane Eyre*, there was a 'murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor', which she read as a 'murmuring against God's appointment'. Brontë was deeply wounded by this review, even penning a response to it for an unpublished preface to *Shirley*. It is possible Brontë has such criticisms in mind when representing class conflict in *Shirley*, thereby choosing to offer no obvious partisanship. See Rigby, 'Vanity Fair — and Jane Eyre', from an unsigned review, *Quarterly Review*, December 1848, 153–85, in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 105–12 (p. 109).
- ²³ Heather Miner, 'Dissent in Fragments: Multivocality in *Shirley*', *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 9.1 (2013), paras 1–33 (para. 10).
- ²⁴ Adrian Randall, 'Foreword', in *Writings of the Luddites*, ed. by Kevin Binfield (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, c. 2004), pp. xiii–xviii (p. xv).
- ²⁵ Susan Belasco Smith, '"A Yorkshire Burr": Language in *Shirley*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 27.4 (1987), 637–45 (p. 638).
- ²⁶ Albert D. Pionke, 'Reframing the Luddites: Materialist and Idealist Models of Self in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*', *Victorian Review*, 30.2 (2004), 81–102 (p. 90).
- ²⁷ Miner, para. 15.
- ²⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 604.
- ²⁹ Randall, p. xvi.
- ³⁰ Pionke, p. 85.
- ³¹ Pionke, p. 85.
- ³² Eagleton, p. 47.
- ³³ Pionke also identifies this 'double distanc[ing]', writing that the reader is detached from instances of political violence 'since they are focalised through characters [...] who neither directly participate in them nor even see them occur; both are only indirectly overheard by the reader, whose ability to appreciate the motives of the Luddites suffers accordingly'. See Pionke, p. 91.

- ³⁴Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 90.
- ³⁵Mikita Brottman, *Hyena* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), pp. 53–54.
- ³⁶Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion*, canto VI, section 26, in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott: Vol. II*, ed. by the Revd George Gilfillan (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1857), p. 186, quoted in Frank Peel, *The Rising of the Luddites, Chartists, and Plug-drawers* (London: Cass, 1968), p. 87.
- ³⁷To W. S. Williams, 12 May 1848, in *Letters*, II, 63–68 (p. 66).
- ³⁸In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854), the cry reappears, when a crowd of mill-workers attempts to gain entry to John Thornton's mill: 'As soon as they saw Mr. Thornton, they set up a yell, — to call it not human is nothing, — it was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening'. The starvation of the workers is, as in *Shirley*, highlighted as the driving force of their wildness; and, once more, the workers are envisioned as 'wild beasts', hyena-like. See Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. by Patricia Ingham (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 175.
- ³⁹Francesco Marroni, *Victorian Disharmonies: A Reconsideration of Nineteenth-Century English Fiction* (Rome: John Cabot University Press, 2010), p. 18.
- ⁴⁰Ingham, p. 39.
- ⁴¹Marroni, p. 17.
- ⁴²'Disturbances &c.', *Leeds Mercury*, 25 April 1812.
- ⁴³'Atrocious Murder', *Leeds Mercury*, 2 May 1812.
- ⁴⁴'Disturbances &c.', *Leeds Mercury*, 25 April 1812.

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